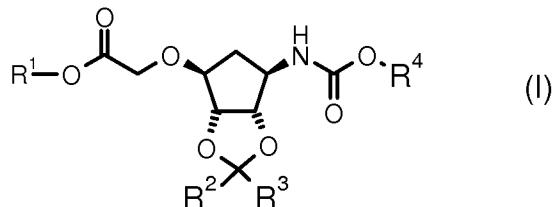


In the Claims:

The current status of all claims is listed below and supercedes all previous lists of claims.

Please amend claims 3-17, and add new claims 18-20 as follows.

1. (original) A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (I):



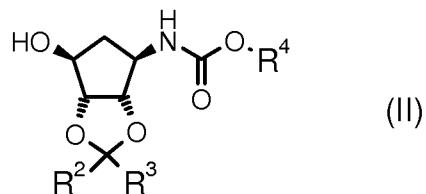
wherein

R¹ is C₁₋₆ alkyl;

R² and R³ are, independently, C₁₋₆ alkyl; and

R⁴ is C₁₋₆ alkyl or benzyl (wherein the phenyl ring of benzyl is optionally substituted by nitro, S(O)₂(C₁₋₄ alkyl), cyano, C₁₋₄ alkyl, C₁₋₄ alkoxy, C(O)(C₁₋₄ alkyl), N(C₁₋₆ alkyl)₂, CF₃ or OCF₃);

the process comprising reacting a compound of formula (II):



wherein R², R³ and R⁴ are as defined above, with a suitable base; and

reacting the product so formed with R¹OC(O)CH₂X, wherein R¹ is as defined above and X is chloro, bromo or iodo;

wherein the process is carried out in a suitable solvent at a temperature in the range -40°C to -5°C; and wherein at least 0.2 moles of the compound of formula (II) are used in the process.

2. (original) A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein R¹, R² and R³ are independently selected from C₁₋₄ alkyl.

3. (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1~~or 2~~ wherein R¹ is ethyl.
4. (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, ~~2 or 3~~ wherein R² and R³ are methyl.
5. (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, ~~2, 3 or 4~~ wherein R⁴ is benzyl optionally substituted by C₁₋₄ alkyl.
6. (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, ~~2, 3, 4 or 5~~ wherein R⁴ is unsubstituted benzyl.
7. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 6~~ claim 1 wherein X is bromo.
8. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~ claim 1 wherein the base is an alkyl metal C₁₋₆ alkoxide.
9. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 8~~ claim 1 wherein the base is potassium tert-butoxide.
10. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 9~~ claim 1 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: R¹O₂CCH₂X : compound of formula (II) is (1 to 1.3):(1 to 1.3):1.
11. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 10~~ claim 1 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: R¹O₂CCH₂X : compound of formula (II) is (1.1 to 1.3):(1.1 to 1.3):1.
12. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 11~~ claim 1 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: R¹O₂CCH₂X : compound of formula (II) is 1.2:1.2:1.

13. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 12~~ claim 1 wherein the solvent is selected from a cyclic ether, an aliphatic ~~ethers~~ ether and an aromatic solvent.
14. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 13~~ claim 1 wherein the solvent is selected from tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, diisopropyl ether, methyl tert-butyl ether, benzene, toluene and xylene; and a mixture of two or more of said solvents.
15. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 14~~ claim 1 wherein the solvent is tetrahydrofuran.
16. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 15~~ claim 1 wherein the temperature is in the range -30°C to -10°C.
17. (currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 16~~ claim 1 wherein the temperature is in the range -25°C to -15°C.
18. (new) A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein:
R¹ is ethyl;
R² and R³ are methyl;
R⁴ is unsubstituted benzyl;
X is bromo; and
the base is potassium tert-butoxide.
19. (new) A process as claimed in claim 18 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: R¹O₂CCH₂X : compound of formula (II) is 1.2:1.2:1, and wherein the solvent is selected from tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, diisopropyl ether, methyl tert-butyl ether, benzene, toluene and xylene, or a mixture of two or more of said solvents.
20. (new) A process as claimed in claim 19 wherein the the temperature is in the range -25°C to -15°C.